[Commentary] The “common view” and the “cultural binary”— and how to move forward

Article (Accepted Version)

Commentary on Takano and Osaka (2018):

The "Common View" and the "Cultural Binary"—And How to Move Forward

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Abstract

Takano and Osaka's (1997, 1999) careful review of empirical research on individualism and collectivism in the US and Japan revealed a striking lack of support for the "common view" that Japanese individuals are typical collectivists whereas Americans are typical individualists. Two decades on, Takano and Osaka (2018) conclude that empirical studies have continued to fail to support the common view—and yet this view is stubbornly persistent in the literature. More is at stake here than the characterization of two national cultures. The common view epitomizes a widely adopted binary view of culture, which reduces the richness and complexity of global cultural diversity to an oversimplified contrast between *individualist/independent/Western/North American* and *collectivist/interdependent/Eastern/East Asian* categories. Unless cultural psychologists can move beyond binary thinking and research practices, correcting an inaccurate portrayal of American and Japanese cultures will be of limited benefit. Future progress might be fostered by (a) defining concepts more precisely, (b) more use of exploratory approaches, (c) wider sampling of cultural groups and contexts, (d) using available methodological guidance for cross-cultural research, and (e) expanding research into cultural identities and stereotypes.

Commentary on Takano and Osaka (2018):

The "Common View" and the "Cultural Binary"—And How to Move Forward

In the late 20th century, social psychologists developed a sudden interest in culture, fueled by research findings showing that East Asian research participants sometimes did not think, feel, or act in the same way as North Americans (e.g., Heine & Lehman, 1997; Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997; Triandis, McCusker, & Hui, 1990). A common explanation for these findings was that "Western" nations—exemplified by the USA—had a cultural emphasis on individualism (or independence), whereas "Eastern" (or even all "non-Western") nations—exemplified by Japan—had a cultural emphasis on collectivism (or interdependence) (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1993). Thus, culture was reconceptualized as a quasi-experimental variable that could be incorporated into standard social psychological research designs by comparing participants from a "Western" nation (e.g., USA) with participants from a "non-Western" nation (e.g., Japan).

It was in this context that Takano and Osaka (1997, 1999) published their first review of individualism and collectivism in the USA and Japan. They carefully documented that there was surprisingly little evidence for the "common view" that US participants would show greater individualism whereas Japanese participants would show greater collectivism; findings were similar when using self-report or behavioral indicators of individualism and collectivism. I can still remember my excitement, as a young researcher skeptical of what I was reading about individualism and collectivism in the North American literature, when I first heard about the 1997 paper, unfortunately published in a language that I could not read, and then very fortunately discovered the 1999 English translation. In terms of the quasi-experimental approach to cultural psychology, Takano and Osaka's review seemed to indicate a catastrophic failure of the "manipulation check".

However, Takano and Osaka's (1997, 1999) review did not slow the quasi-experimental approach. Nor did two subsequent meta-analyses of cross-cultural variation in self-report measures of individualism-collectivism (I-C) and the related constructs of independent and interdependent self-construals (Levine et al., 2003; Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). In their updated

review, Takano and Osaka (2018) conclude that two more decades of research have not supported the common view. Refuting several alternative explanations for this lack of support, their conclusion is not restricted to studies that relied on self-reports, nor to those that relied on student samples.

Why, then, is the common view so stubbornly persistent? Takano and Osaka (1999) proposed that the common view originated in biased information processing—especially the fundamental attribution error, whereby historical instances of collectivist behavior by Japanese people were wrongly attributed by culturally dominant Western observers to national character, rather than to situations of external threat to Japanese society—which would be expected to trigger pressures towards conformity (see Gelfand et al., 2011). They proposed that these initial misattributions led to the formation of a stereotype of the Japanese as collectivist, reinforced by cognitive mechanisms such as the out-group homogeneity effect and the confirmation bias. Echoed by some Japanese commentators, the common view then became a self-stereotype among the Japanese people. This historical account helps to explain why Japanese people have come to be seen as collectivists, but it says nothing about why Americans have come to be seen as individualists. Nor does it explain why the common view is so widespread and persistent—seemingly immune from empirical refutation—in mainstream contemporary social psychology. One might expect social psychologists to be engaged in questioning cultural stereotypes, rather than propagating them.

I believe that much more is at stake here than the cultural characterization of two of the world's 200+ nations. I suspect that social psychologists may be unwilling to question the common view, in part because this view is closely tied to certain deeply held, but highly problematic, core assumptions within our discipline. Moreover, certain research practices make it easier to attend to evidence for, while dismissing evidence against, the common view. In my commentary, I will outline these assumptions and practices and consider how we might improve upon them.

The "common view" and the "cultural binary"

Added to the attribution and stereotyping processes highlighted by Takano and Osaka (1999), I believe that social psychologists are highly invested in the common view because it is seen as the

prototypical illustration of a binary view of culture, which has shaped social psychological thinking about culture for more than 25 years. The "cultural binary" is an oversimplified contrast between *individualist/independent/Western/North American* and *collectivist/interdependent/Eastern/East Asian* cultures (Vignoles et al., 2016). To understand its origins and appeal, one should recognize that social psychology, like any other body of scientific thought, is constructed in part through social processes that do not happen in a cultural vacuum (Holton, 1973; Moscovici, 1993).

Human language and thinking are commonly structured around semantic contrasts or binary oppositions (Derrida, 1982; Moscovici & Vignaux, 2000; Osgood, 1952; Saussure, 1959). Early in their development, children learn about "opposites": that "black" is the opposite of "white", "down" is the opposite of "up", "bad" is the opposite of "good", and so on (Murphy & Jones, 2008). Depending on their cultural context, children might also learn that "animal" is the opposite of "human", "social" is the opposite of "individual", "women" are the opposite of "men", or that "East" is the opposite of "West". Binary oppositions such as these have been described as *themata*: shared, and usually taken-for-granted, conceptual foundations upon which cultural groups build their representations of reality (Moscovici & Vignaux, 2000). Themata may become interrelated in cultural discourse: for example, in a given cultural context, women might be portrayed as more "animal" and men as more "human", or black people as "bad" and white people as "good" (e.g., Renninger & Williams, 1966; Rudman & Mescher, 2012). Social theorists have often advocated identifying, questioning, and ultimately *deconstructing* the binary oppositions underlying everyday social discourse and thinking (e.g., Derrida, 1982). Deconstructing binaries potentially liberates people to propose and adopt alternative constructions of reality—by deconstructing the "animal/human" dichotomy, we can recognize our many similarities to other animals without this making us less human; by deconstructing the "masculine vs. feminine" dichotomy, we can embody masculinities or femininities that do not have to be defined in opposition to each other.

Social psychologists have sometimes contributed to deconstructing binary oppositions (e.g., Bem, 1974; Kessler, 1998), but our thinking is not immune from cultural assumptions. A binary

opposition that seemingly underlies much thinking in psychology is the idea that "social" is the opposite of "individual". For over 100 years, scholars across disciplines have identified and questioned this cultural assumption, pointing out that individuality and sociality—far from being opposites—are both indispensable *and mutually reinforcing* aspects of human functioning (Green & Werner, 1996; Guisinger & Blatt, 1994; Kağıtçıbaşı, 2005; MacDougall, 1912; Marková, 1997; Spiro, 1993; Taylor, 1991; Vignoles, in press; Vignoles, Chryssochoou, & Breakwell, 2004). Yet contemporary psychological theorizing appears to reflect an "individual vs. social" binary opposition when it separates "nature" from "nurture" (Plomin, 1990), "agency" from "communion" (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007), "personal identity" from "social identity" (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), "independent" from "interdependent self-construals" (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), "differentiation" from "assimilation" (Brewer, 1991), "individualism" from "collectivism" (Triandis, 1993), and even "personality psychology" from "social psychology" (Deaux & Snyder, 2012).

One unfortunate consequence of building theory on cultural assumptions is that the meanings of one's concepts may seem to be self-evident or "natural"—and therefore not needing careful or precise definitions. Such is the case, I believe, with individualism and collectivism. Admittedly, many authors have offered formal definitions of individualism and collectivism (e.g., Brewer & Chen, 1997; Hofstede, 2001; Takano & Osaka, 1999; Triandis, 1993), but researchers and students implicitly "already know" what these terms mean, because of their resonance with the taken-for-granted "individual vs. social" opposition. As a result, the concepts of individualism and collectivism are often used extremely loosely: individualism potentially encompasses anything that is thought to reflect human individuality, and collectivism potentially encompasses anything that is thought to reflect human sociality. As a consequence, crucial questions about how individuality is accomplished in a collectivist society and how social cohesion is accomplished in an individualist society are not given sufficient attention (Durkheim, 1898/1969; Spiro, 1993; Vignoles, Chryssochoou, & Breakwell, 2000).

The perceived 'naturalness' of the opposition between individualism and collectivism is reinforced by its confounding with another taken-for-granted binary opposition—the popular

distinction between so-called “Western” and “Eastern” nations. Equating individualism with “The West” and collectivism with “The East”, together with the quasi-experimental approach to studying culture, transforms I-C from an abstract dimension (e.g., Hofstede, 2001; Minkov, 2018) into a concrete typology with just two categories: Western individualism and Eastern collectivism. Cultural groups that are neither “Western” nor “Eastern”—including those residing in South America, Africa, the Middle East, West Asia, and Eastern Europe—may be either misrepresented or marginalized entirely from the scientific discourse. Thus, the kaleidoscopic richness of global cultural variation is reduced to a monolithic “cultural binary”, exemplified by the “common view” of Americans as individualistic (representing “Western” cultures) and Japanese as collectivistic (representing “Eastern” and, by extension, other “non-Western” cultures).

Ambiguities in defining I-C

In their reviews, Takano and Osaka (1997, 1999, 2018) have questioned the positioning of American and Japanese participants on the I-C dimension, but they have not questioned the utility of I-C as a dimension for comparing cultural groups or their individual members. Takano and Osaka (2018) strongly defend the concept of I-C, describing it as a “ready-made concept” comparable to the concept of “length” in measurement. In my view, however, it is important to grapple with important conceptual ambiguities and inconsistencies in the I-C construct, as it has been used by different researchers—and even by the same researchers over time. Because they do not do so, Takano and Osaka’s conclusions apply to their own definition of I-C, but they may not necessarily apply to alternative conceptualizations of I-C. Two areas of conceptual slippage in I-C research seem especially important:

First is the level of analysis at which individualism and collectivism are located. Hofstede (2001) defined individualism and collectivism as forms of social organization—properties of societies and not individuals. He emphasized the importance of distinguishing individual and cultural levels of analysis: “Cultures are not king-size individuals […] and their internal logic cannot be understood in the terms used for the personality dynamics of individuals” (Hofstede, 2001, p. 17). Thus, for him,

cultural dimensions such as I-C are context variables, rather than person variables; in this view, claiming that Japanese *individuals* are collectivistic would be not simply inaccurate but meaningless—a category error. Similarly, Triandis (1993) defined individualism and collectivism as "cultural syndromes", rather than properties of individuals. To avoid confusion, Triandis, Chan, Bhawuk, Iwao, and Sinha (1995) proposed different terminology—*idiocentrism* and *allocentrism*—for individual differences on dimensions associated with cultural I-C. However, Triandis and Gelfand (1998) subsequently reverted to "individualism" and "collectivism" when naming their individual differences measure. These terms are now widely used to describe individuals, as well as cultures, and it is the characterization of US and Japanese *individuals* as differing on I-C that Takano and Osaka (1997, 1999, 2018) labelled as the "common view" and evaluated in their reviews. It remains possible that US and Japanese *societies* may differ on I-C, but that these differences are at the level of societal organization, rather than the personality tendencies of societal members.

A second area of conceptual slippage involves the conceptual boundaries and underlying dimensionality of the I-C construct. Triandis and colleagues (1995) defined both cultural I-C and individual idiocentrism-allocentrism as multifaceted constructs, encompassing numerous dimensions of beliefs, values, self-views, norms, attitudes, and other variables that they considered to be "organized around a central theme" (p. 462). For their meta-analysis of I-C studies, Oyserman et al. (2002) identified seven "components" of individualism (independence, personal goals, competition, uniqueness, privacy, self-knowledge, and direct communication) and eight "components" of collectivism (relational self, belonging, duty, harmony, seeking advice, contextual variability, hierarchy, and group work). Different subsets of these 15 components were represented among the items of different I-C measures. Moreover, the measures varied in dimensionality: some treated I-C as a single bipolar construct, others measured individualism and collectivism as separate constructs, and a few distinguished types of individualism and types of collectivism.

Takano and Osaka (1997, 1999) initially did not consider possible multidimensionality of I-C when evaluating the common view. Instead, they appealed to an "ordinary definition of I/C" (1999,

p. 313), which they defined as a bipolar continuum, such that "Individualism gives priority to an individual and stresses autonomy, whereas collectivism gives priority to an in-group and stresses conformity" (p. 314). Takano and Osaka (2018) argue that I-C, thus defined, is a unitary dimension—claiming that it is no more multidimensional than the concept of "length" in physics and that its supposed multidimensionality is limited to variation across contexts (for example, one might be collectivistic in relation to one's family but individualistic in relation to one's nation: Realo & Allik, 1999), but not variation in content. Conceptually, however, the components of their "ordinary definition"—prioritizing personal vs. in-group goals, autonomy, and conformity—are separable: One might autonomously choose to behave similarly to others, or one might be influenced to behave differently from others (i.e., autonomy is not necessarily the opposite of conformity); moreover, one might do any of these things to serve either a personal or an in-group goal. Vignoles et al. (2016) found that self-construal dimensions of self-direction vs. reception to influence (i.e. high vs. low autonomy), difference vs. similarity (i.e. low vs. high conformity), and self-interest versus commitment to others (i.e. prioritizing personal vs. in-group goals) showed relatively little shared variance at the individual level (*r*'s = .214, .288, .435) and several correlations were *negative* at the cultural level (*r* = -.361, -.241, .464). Thus, I believe that the "ordinary definition of I/C" is not unidimensional. Moreover, it omits many other features that have been conceptualized and measured as components of I-C (Oyserman et al., 2002, as described above).

Furthermore, Hofstede (2001) defined I-C as a dimension of cultural values and subsequent writers considered values as an important component of I-C (Brewer & Chen, 2007; Triandis, 1993), whereas Takano and Osaka (1999, 2018) bracket off studies of values in a separate part of their review. Similarly, many writers consider differences in self-construal to be an important facet of I-C (Brewer & Chen, 2007; Triandis, 1993) and measures of I-C often share many of the same items as measures of independent and interdependent self-construals (Oyserman et al., 2002), but Takano and Osaka (1999, 2018) decided to exclude studies of self-construal entirely from their review. This

raises the possibility that conclusions about US individualism and Japanese collectivism might depend on how one draws the conceptual and empirical boundaries of these constructs.

Although I understand their choice to stick to a relatively precise and narrow conceptual definition of I-C, I am sorry that Takano and Osaka (2018) did not also delve a little deeper into the potential implications of "messier" multidimensional conceptualizations. Doing so might have revealed a more nuanced picture of cultural similarities and differences among American and Japanese participants. Perhaps this might also have helped explain the heterogeneous pattern of findings in their review, where 14% of studies significantly supported the common view, 31% of studies showed significant results opposite to the common view, and 54% showed non-significant or mixed results. As the authors note, there were more significant results both for and in opposition to the common view than would be expected based on a simple null hypothesis.

US and Japanese cultures in global context

Toward this end, it may be interesting to explore how US and Japanese samples are positioned in the context of larger multinational studies of cultural values (S. H. Schwartz, 2006), models of selfhood (Vignoles et al., 2016), and practices (Gelfand et al., 2011; Thomson et al., 2018; Uz, 2014). In Schwartz' (2006) study of cultural value priorities in 76 nations, US samples occupied a moderate position on the dimension of autonomy versus embeddedness (which is conceptually and empirically closest to I-C), and they showed a relatively strong focus on values of mastery and hierarchy over harmony and egalitarianism; Japanese samples showed an unusual pattern, strongly emphasizing harmony values as well as hierarchy over egalitarianism (suggestive of collectivism), but also prioritizing autonomy over embeddedness values (suggestive of individualism).

In Vignoles and colleagues' (2016) study of models of selfhood in 55 cultural groups, US samples shared a relatively strong emphasis on two forms of independence—difference (vs. similarity) and self-expression (vs. harmony)—but not others; meanwhile, Japanese samples scored very highly on two other aspects of independence—self-containment (vs. connection to others) and

self-direction (vs. reception to influence)—but also on two aspects of interdependence—variability (vs. consistency) and dependence on others (vs. self-reliance).

In studies of cultural tightness versus looseness across 33 nations (Gelfand et al., 2011) and among representative samples from 68 nations (Uz, 2014), Japanese samples showed somewhat tighter norms than US samples, but both countries were towards the middle when viewed in a wider global context. However, in a study of differences in relational mobility across 39 nations, Japanese participants reported the lowest relational mobility of all nations sampled, whereas US participants reported among the highest levels of relational mobility (Thomson et al., 2018).

In their values, models of selfhood and cultural practices, US samples are not representative of "Western" cultures, and Japanese samples appear highly atypical of "Confucian" or "South/East Asian" samples—let alone the totality of "non-Western" cultures. Moreover, when viewed against a global backdrop, neither of these national cultures seems clearly "individualist" or "collectivist"—participants in each nation appear individualist in some respects and collectivist in others. Nevertheless, when interpreted through the lens of the "cultural binary" and a rather flexible definition of I-C, it is not hard to see how a superficial interpreter might seize on the individualist aspects of US culture and the collectivist aspects of Japanese culture as evidence that US individuals are indeed individualistic and Japanese individuals are indeed collectivistic.

Explaining away discrepant findings

For a would-be defender of the "common view", a remaining problem is how to explain away the many findings of Japanese individualism and American collectivism, as well as those showing no difference. A common explanation for these discrepancies is that they are due to "methodological limitations". I recently attended a talk by a researcher describing an impressive program of cross-cultural studies. The researcher presented results showing the predicted cross-cultural (i.e., West vs. East) differences on her outcome variable, as well as that the outcome variable was associated as expected with individual differences on an I-C measure. When asked whether she had tested if individualism and collectivism accounted for (i.e., mediated) the observed cross-cultural differences

on her outcome variable, she replied that the cultural groups did not show the expected mean differences on the I-C measure and so a mediation analysis was impossible, but this was OK because "these measures never show the expected mean differences". Her solution—like that of many I-C researchers—was simply not to present the group means. Thus, when the results do not match the theory, the results must be wrong—and the theory becomes unfalsifiable.

In their updated review, Takano and Osaka (2018) dispel several methodological explanations that are often used to discount results that are inconvenient for the common view or the cultural binary. First, they show that their pattern of findings is not due to overreliance on student samples. Student samples by their nature are unrepresentative of the nations from which they are drawn. More seriously, students may be differentially unrepresentative in different nations—given that the proportion of young people continuing to higher education differs greatly across nations (United Nations Development Programme, 2018). Crucially, then Takano and Osaka show that the common view has been unsupported in studies of student, adult, and even nationally representative samples.

Second, Takano and Osaka (2018) show that the inconvenient results are not due to response artifacts on self-report scales, such as acquiescent responding (Smith et al., 2016) or the reference group effect (Heine, Lehman, Peng, & Greenholtz, 2002). Members of different cultural groups are known to differ in communication styles—including their use of response scales on self-report questionnaires (Smith et al., 2016). Thus, it is important to account for response styles—especially acquiescent responding—when comparing self-report measures across cultures. Yet, many well-used measures in cross-cultural psychology include no reversed items, making it very difficult to adjust for the potentially confounding effects of individual or cultural response styles. Moreover, it is argued that people typically respond to traditional self-report measures by comparing themselves against an implicit frame of reference—which might be a national or local context. Thus, participants in different cultural environments may be rating themselves in relation to different frames of reference when completing self-report measures of cultural orientation, and this may dilute or even eliminate observed cross-cultural differences (Heine et al., 2002). Crucially, then, Takano and Osaka (2018)

show that the failure of support for the common view is not restricted to self-report measures of cultural orientation, but also extends to behavioral measures—which should not be affected by acquiescent response styles, nor by reference group effects.

Thus, while it might be possible to explain away discrepant findings in any individual study in terms of sampling limitations, response styles, or reference group effects, Takano and Osaka (2018) persuasively argue that such explanations are insufficient when looking across the literature. Nonetheless, these issues are not insuperable for individual studies, and researchers ideally should aim to sample widely, adjust statistically for response styles, and take steps to minimize reference group effects when running any cross-cultural study.

Embracing the complexity of global cultures

I have argued that the "common view" of US and Japanese cultures is resistant to change, even in the face of disconfirming evidence, for several reasons: First, it is closely tied to a binary implicit theory of culture, which in turn is anchored in a problematic—but deeply held—cultural assumption that sociality is fundamentally opposed to individuality, and an equally problematic—but widely adopted—division of the world's nations into "Western" and "non-Western" categories. Second, the cultural binary encourages rather imprecise thinking about the definition, conceptual boundaries, and likely dimensionality of individualism and collectivism; this conceptual imprecision fosters theoretical predictions that are vague and flexible enough that the perspective is hard to falsify. Third, researchers often do not optimally incorporate methodological recommendations for cross-cultural research into their studies, which leaves room for maneuver in interpreting results that are unsupportive. In short, the common view is deeply embedded in contemporary social psychological thinking and research practices, and it is well defended.

How, then, might we move our field beyond the common view of US and Japanese cultures, or even deconstruct the "cultural binary" assumption? I will propose five recommendations that might help our field to build more comprehensive, useful, and accurate understandings of the nature and distribution of global cultural variations, their antecedents and their consequences. None of these

suggestions is new, and many researchers already follow them. Nonetheless, I believe that all five recommendations would benefit from more widespread attention.

Recommendation 1: Define concepts more precisely

My first suggestion is a plea for conceptual precision. The "common view" and the "cultural binary" have persisted in the literature not despite, but *because of* their conceptual vagueness, which makes them harder to falsify. To facilitate a social psychology of culture that is grounded in data, rather than stereotypes, we need to be clear about what we are measuring. Are individualism and collectivism properties of societies, of individuals, or both? If both, then what exactly do we mean when we attribute the same property to an individual as to a society? If I-C encompasses multiple dimensions of beliefs, values, practices, and so on, then exactly which dimensions are included, and where are the conceptual boundaries of I-C?

Greater conceptual precision would allow for a proper evaluation of the utility of the I-C construct. To what extent do the theorized facets of I-C actually covary at cultural and/or individual levels of analysis, and what is their internal structure? In other words, does the broad construct of I-C provide a useful summary of covariation in beliefs, values, practices, and so on, at a cultural level of analysis, an individual level of analysis, both, or neither? Conversely, much may be gained from a more fine-grained examination of cultural and individual variation on multiple dimensions of values (S. H. Schwartz, 2006), beliefs (Leung & Bond, 2008; Owe et al., 2013), models of selfhood (Vignoles et al., 2016), or practices (Gelfand et al., 2011; Thomson et al., 2018). In all of these domains, important dimensions of cultural variation have already been identified that are not reducible to individualism and collectivism, however these are defined.

Recommendation 2: Go exploring

Researchers will be able to construct more useful understandings about other cultures to the extent that they can transcend their own cultural assumptions. No individual is likely to have a sufficiently broad vantage point, from their personal location in cultural space, to derive a complete understanding of cultural differences *a priori*, and so engagement with diverse cultural perspectives

and concepts is needed. Working with culturally diverse collaborators may help, but this is not a complete solution—especially if the collaborators have unequal status. At least as important in my view is (a) to engage with research literatures from diverse cultural sources, and (b) to give adequate priority to exploratory research when developing new theory.

The field of indigenous psychologies (Kim & Berry, 1993; Kim, Yang, & Hwang, 2006) provides a hugely valuable resource for any researcher seeking to develop their thinking about culture and psychology. When, as a PhD student in the late 1990's, I was struggling to understand how a distinctive identity would be possible in collectivist cultures, I found answers to my questions once I stopped focusing on Western writings about I-C and started exploring the writings of psychologists who lived in cultures that were labeled as collectivist (e.g., Gao, 1996; Ho, 1995; Kim, 1994; see Vignoles et al., 2000). It became apparent to me that the prevailing conceptual of "undifferentiated collectivism" among Western researchers (see Kim, 1994) was based on misapplying a theoretical conception of the collective that arose in Western social psychology (e.g., Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) and was quite alien to members of the East Asian cultures that it was being applied to (see Yuki, 2011).

Equally crucial is a willingness to learn directly from research participants in diverse cultural contexts, by conducting exploratory research. Recent trends in social psychology have been towards an ever-narrower focus on hypothetico-deductive research, where findings are given credence to the extent that they were predicted in advance. Meanwhile, the term "exploratory" is sometimes used as a derogatory term, synonymous with "atheoretical" or even "unscientific". Of course, misrepresenting exploratory research as hypothesis-testing is dishonest, and it can invalidate statistical tests (Kerr, 1998). However, the best solution to this is not to avoid conducting or reporting exploratory studies, but to describe them accurately and highlight their contribution to *hypothesis-building* rather than *hypothesis-testing*. As is recognized in qualitative psychology, the value of an exploratory study may lie especially in those new insights that the researchers did not expect, rather than in the extent to which it matches prior expectations (Stiles, 1993). Nonetheless,

exploration does not have to be aimless, nor does it happen in a theoretical vacuum—exploratory studies can be highly structured and theoretically-guided (e.g., Vignoles et al., 2016).

Recommendation 3: Study diverse cultural groups or contexts

One consequence of the quasi-experimental approach to studying culture is that researchers often seek to maximize comparability by selecting participants who occupy a similar social position within their respective nations—most often university students. Within the logic of experimentation, this potentially makes sense, provided that "culture" is equated with "nation". However, cultural diversity does not only occur between nations. There may be considerable cultural variation across different communities within nations, whether these are ethnic groups, regions, urban and rural locations, socioeconomic groups, or age groups. Thus, comparing students across pairs of nations may considerably limit the range of cultural variation that can be studied. Also underrepresented are cultural groups from parts of the world that are neither "Western" nor "Eastern"—and so cultural dimensions and characteristics that may be important for understanding these groups and contexts also are likely to be underrepresented in our theoretical arsenal.

Focused two-culture comparisons remain valuable for some purposes, but the feasibility of conducting large multi-national studies has greatly improved in recent years, owing to psychology's expansion in many nations as well as the greater ease of contacting both research collaborators and participants in distant countries via the internet. One major benefit of conducting multi-national studies is the possibility of multilevel analyses, allowing researchers to distinguish relationships occurring at individual or cultural levels of analysis. This is important because the effects of living in a certain kind of cultural context may be quite different from the effects of personally endorsing the corresponding cultural orientation (e.g., Becker et al., 2014).

Recommendation 4: Use the available methodological guidelines

My fourth recommendation is a portmanteau one: There is a wealth of methodological advice available for psychologists who want to conduct research in more than one culture (e.g., van de Vijver & Leung, 1997). Yet, in some quarters this advice is rarely followed, or it is used only *post*

hoc—to explain away inconvenient results as likely due to methodological deficiencies. Reiterating all of the available advice would be beyond the scope of this commentary, but I will highlight three points that I view as especially important:

First, there is much available advice on maximizing comparability of meaning across cultural contexts. One key point is *cultural decentering* (Werner & Campbell, 1970): Materials should not include content with cultural references or idioms that are likely to be difficult to translate into other languages or for participants in diverse settings to interpret. Where only two languages are involved, cultural decentering might be aided through a willingness to change the original language version, as well as the translated version, when checking translations. Where more languages are involved, collaborators should be consulted prior to translation, or it may be useful to do a 'dry run' of the translation process into several of the most distant languages, use this to optimize translatability of the original version, and then do the main translations. Main translations should be produced by a committee and/or be checked using an *independent back-translation* (Brislin, Lonner, & Thorndike, 1973), conducted by someone who is not familiar with the original version. The back-translation should be checked thoroughly by a researcher who is equipped to evaluate consistency with the intended meaning of the original version, and who can ask the translators questions to help fine-tune the translation where there might be scope for improvement.

Second, it is important to account for individual and cultural differences in scale usage (e.g., acquiescent response styles) when designing measures and in statistical analyses. Although Takano and Osaka (1997, 1999, 2018) found that using self-report measures did not alter their main conclusions, it remains the case that response styles can affect not only mean scores on self-report measures of cultural orientation, but also the internal structure of these measures (e.g., Vignoles et al., 2016). Thus, more accurate results can be obtained if acquiescent responding is accounted for by (a) including both forward- and reverse-scored items in each measure and (b) adjusting statistically for response tendencies through one of the methods available (Fischer & Milfont, 2010; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012; Welkenhuysen-Gybels, Billiet, & Cambré, 2003).

Third, researchers should make at least some attempt to establish measurement invariance across the samples studied (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002; Milfont & Fischer, 2010). Note, however, that different levels of invariance are needed for different purposes (Little, Card, Slegers, & Ledford, 2007) and that conventional cut-off criteria for model fit may not be realistic for more complex models, even with single samples (Kenny & McCoach, 2003; Marsh, Hau, & Wen, 2004)—let alone when multiple and culturally diverse samples are involved. Thus, measurement invariance testing should be a pragmatic process, not necessarily expecting to achieve a perfect fit, but nonetheless providing an opportunity to optimize one's measures, by selecting the best performing items across cultures and removing those items that clearly fail to perform comparably.

Recommendation 5: Expand research into cultural identities and stereotypes

Finally, if the "cultural binary" poses a risk of basing cross-cultural understanding on stereotypes, then one way to counteract this is to make cultural stereotyping an explicit research focus. This might help researchers identify when stereotypes are at play—and thus when they might be involved in producing research findings. An important caveat, however, is that the involvement of stereotypes does not necessarily entail that a cultural difference is not real. As Takano and Osaka (1999) recognized, stereotypes may sometimes contain a "kernel of truth". Moreover, in certain circumstances, stereotypes can become self-fulfilling prophecies—especially when people identify with the category to which the stereotype pertains (Vignoles, in press).

This becomes especially important as we move into an age of globalization—characterized by increasing intercultural contact. Self-categorization theory suggests that people become more aware of group identities when they find themselves in an intergroup situation (Turner et al., 1987). By implication, globalization may therefore transform *cultures*—in the sense of taken-for-granted patterns of beliefs, values, and practices—into *cultural identities*—aspects of self-definition that individuals are motivated to enact, have recognized by others, and defend (S. J. Schwartz, Vignoles, Brown, & Zagefka, 2014; Vignoles, in press). An intriguing possible consequence of globalization is that the "common view" of Americans as individualists and Japanese as collectivists might eventually

come true—not because it was true in the first place, but because it is thought to be true—as American and Japanese individuals strive to validate their cultural identities.

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